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Actions in follow-up to the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development

Letter dated 30 March 2010 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the outcome document entitled "Beijing call to action", adopted at the fifth Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights, which was held in Beijing from 17 to 20 October 2009 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you could have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the forty-third session of the Commission on Population and Development.

(*Signed*) Li **Baodong**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* See E/CN.9/2010/1.

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Annex to the letter dated 30 March 2010 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Chinese and English]

5th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights

Beijing, 20 October 2009

Beijing call to action

Background

Over one quarter of the world's people were born since the International Conference on Population and Development, yet even today they do not fully enjoy the guarantees of services and rights promised by 179 nations in 1994. Many adolescents remain ignorant of their reproductive and sexual rights. In some societies they are taken out of school prematurely to be thrust into marriages arranged without regard to their personal preferences. Too often they are subject to gender-based violence and disrespectful treatment. Women and men continue to struggle in many societies to obtain the services that would guarantee safe childbearing and achievement of their family formation goals. The elderly remain victims of social stereotypes that relegate them to the category of "dependent" despite the continuing contributions they make to society. Their sexuality is overlooked by most programmes of reproductive and sexual health.

The Asia-Pacific community represents an intricate mosaic of cultures and religions, reflecting a full range of reproductive and sexual health and behaviour challenges. It is in this region that many sexual and reproductive challenges are clearly manifested, and it is in consideration of these challenges that we, the representatives of civil societies, universities, parliaments, Governments, donor and youth organizations, have gathered in Beijing for the 5th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights.

We recognize that reproductive and sexual rights and the associated need for universal access to relevant education, social and health services are critical for the development of each individual. Reproductive rights guarantee that all couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so. Sexual rights include the right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to sexuality, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. These are crucial for achieving gender equality and are key components of effective programmes to eradicate poverty and achieve equitable sustainable development. Governments, parliaments and civil society organizations across the Asia-Pacific region urgently need to act on these issues.

We, the participants of the fifth Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights, reaffirm our individual and collective commitment to collaborate to achieve the full realization of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development by 2015. We

recognize that this requires the simultaneous reaffirmation to achieve the Beijing Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Millennium Development Goals.

We recall the outcomes of the previous Asia Pacific conferences on reproductive and sexual health and rights, held in Manila (2001), Bangkok (2003), Kuala Lumpur (2005) and Hyderabad, India (2007) and acknowledge that progress has been made on several issues, especially the integration of population concerns into socio-economic development strategies, the adoption of laws and policies to protect women's rights and empower women and efforts to increase access to reproductive and sexual health services. But much remains to be done, and the need for action is urgent, particularly in the areas set out below.

Reproductive health and rights

Governments should fully recognize sexual and reproductive rights through effective education, policies and services supported by adequate budgets. To do so requires greater commitments to comprehensive family planning and health education and services. This is the most effective way to achieve the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and target 5b of the Millennium Development Goals concerning universal access to reproductive health by 2015. Continuing high levels of mortality surrounding pregnancy and childbirth should alert everybody to the need to include voluntary family planning, skilled birth attendance and emergency obstetric care in efforts to strengthen primary health-care services. Research by the World Health Organization and other organizations has reminded us that even in countries where abortion is legal, women suffer from the risks of unsafe procedures. In many countries debates about the morality of abortion eclipse the commitments made to protect the health and well-being of women. While recognizing the value of traditional health practices, Governments need to ensure that medications and practices provided for reproductive and sexual health are safe and effective. In facing all these challenges, Governments need to ensure that poverty and lack of education are removed as barriers to services for reproductive health and safe childbearing.

Gender equality and empowerment of women

Governments and civil society organizations need to increase their efforts to promote gender equality and equity through laws and policies protecting women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. They should take action to eliminate all forms of violence, trafficking and exploitation of women and girls. This will require them to address inequitable and outmoded cultural practices that stand in the way of women's empowerment. Men and boys who challenge the patriarchal norms and laws that perpetuate gender inequalities from generation to generation deserve recognition and support. They help to establish the necessary foundations of gender equality and empowerment of women, and in doing so they create new and more socially productive roles for men.

Youth

We recognize the distinctive content of the "Youth declaration" (see enclosure) made by the youth participants to this conference and support its full implementation. We join them in urging Governments to provide universal access to

non-judgemental and respectful sexual and reproductive health services, including counselling. Such initiatives will be enhanced by increased resources for meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes.

Ageing population

Though the populations of the Asia Pacific region are ageing rapidly, this is not necessarily the disaster portrayed by many observers. Older people continue to make productive contributions to their families and communities and are in fact major caregivers for members of their own and younger generations. Governments have responsibilities to establish effective social welfare systems and would do well to promote the self-reliance of older persons by facilitating their continued participation in a full range of economic and social activities. Society in general also needs to respect the continuing sexual health needs and rights of older people, including appropriate health services. Issues of sexuality among older people should be informed by social realities rather than blind stereotypes and judgemental expectations.

Migrants

In a region of massive internal and international migration, there are numerous ways in which the sexual and reproductive needs and rights of migrants are ignored or violated. Trafficking is frequently connected to sexual exploitation. Governments have attempted to control the worst aspects of this trade, but much more needs to be done. There is a need for greater international cooperation and national action to protect migrants, including well-designed programmes addressing the sexual and reproductive health needs of all migrants, especially those displaced by conflicts and natural disasters. In this context, civil society organizations play a crucial role in advocacy and the services provided to vulnerable people.

Climate change

There are complex linkages between population, resource consumption and the environmental concerns exemplified in the current international discussions of climate change. These are justifiably commanding the attention of Governments and sparking debates about steps to be taken for the prevention and amelioration of environmental degradation. Nations should remember that rights-based reproductive and sexual health services can make a crucial and direct contribution to sustainable development and welfare in the face of environmental challenges from climate change. We need to avoid false and fruitless competition for official development assistance and national funding. These are complementary issues, not financial trade-offs.

HIV/AIDS

While HIV/AIDS remains the single most recognized disease focus of international health collaboration, its setting within sexual and reproductive health behaviours is often overlooked. We urge Governments to link HIV/AIDS interventions more effectively within established programmes of primary health care and comprehensive reproductive health services as a means to strengthen efforts to prevent the transmission of HIV. Effective programmes must specifically address mother-to-child transmission of the virus and ensure that all people living with the

virus have access to appropriate life-extending medications, free from stigma and discrimination.

Resources and partnerships

The current global economic crisis has hit developing countries particularly hard, with damaging fallout for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. They have been hit by the double blow of reduced domestic resources and failures in international development assistance. Despite the tardy recognition of reproductive and sexual health in the Millennium Development Goals, through the adoption of target 5b of the Millennium Development Goals, there has been a lacklustre reaction by Governments, donors and development institutions to the calls for predictable and long-term financing of policies and programmes. We urge Governments and donors to increase their official development assistance to create and support strong and sustainable reproductive and sexual health programmes.

This is not exclusively or even primarily the responsibility of Governments. Civil society institutions and private enterprises play an important role both on their own and in partnerships with Governments. To be effective they need adequate funding. This requires the mobilization of domestic resources and the coordination of innovations across a range of sectors, including efficient use of development assistance funds.

We strongly urge a rapid response by civil society, parliamentarians, Governments, donors and young people to our call to action on the unfinished agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development to achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015.

The meeting in Beijing recalls the proverb that "in today's actions, take the perspective of 1,000 autumns". In other words, the actions we begin today will determine the welfare of our region, not only tomorrow, but for the whole millennium to come. For this reason, we urge Governments to act wisely and decisively.

Enclosure

5th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights

Beijing, 17 October 2009

Youth Declaration

We, the youth participants of the 5th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights, held in Beijing, from 17 to 20 October 2009, call upon policymakers and decision makers from Governments, donors, the private sector, as well as civil society, to actively address the sexual and reproductive health rights of young people as a global goal, with specific time-bound indicators.

We believe that the meaningful participation of young people plays a vital role in improving their reproductive and sexual health and rights. Embracing the fact that our communities are a reflection of the contributions made by each of their members, including young people, we are committed to finding innovative and effective strategies to meet the challenges that all young people are facing in fulfilling our sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We call upon policymakers, decision makers, Governments, donors, the private sector, civil society and all young people to make every effort to work hand-in-hand in realizing and achieving the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Millennium Development Goals towards creating an enabling environment, so that all young people are empowered to enjoy their sexuality and protect themselves from harm.

All participants of the 5th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights Youth Forum acknowledge that:

- The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Millennium Development Goals continue to play a key role in regional sexual and reproductive health and rights movements in Asia and the Pacific. Under the above-mentioned frameworks, the consistent actions of national Governments, courageous political commitments and positive policy changes for population, health and the environment have contributed significantly to the comprehensive development of young people and adolescents in the Asia and Pacific region. However, we believe that it is necessary to think beyond Cairo and acknowledge the limitations of the Programme of Action by pushing for a more inclusive and progressive agenda.
- The efforts made to provide integrated reproductive health services and education, which are comprehensive, gender-sensitive, youth-friendly, youth-driven, and which recognize the evolving capacities of young people are an invaluable investment in the present and future of the region.

Despite the progress, however, all participants of the 5th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights Youth Forum realize that:

- Denying young people accessible sexual and reproductive health services and education is a violation of the human rights of young people and their right to

development, as affirmed by the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action

- A significant number of young people in Asia and the Pacific do not have enough knowledge about sexual and reproductive health and rights. This leaves them potentially vulnerable to coercion, stigma and discrimination; abuse, violence and exploitation; unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortion and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

- Significantly, poverty and regional disparity in social and economic development is the largest barrier in realizing the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people.

To address these issues, we urge national Governments and civil societies to:

- Fulfil sexual and reproductive health and rights, as they are an inalienable aspect of the right to health of young people.

- Recognize that gender affects the lives and experiences young people. Young people, especially young girls are deeply affected by harmful gender stereotypes and gender inequality. Therefore, actions should be taken towards addressing issues due to gender disparities such as child marriage, forced marriage, early and forced pregnancy.

- Provide a mechanism for easier access to funding and support for youth-led and youth-focused initiatives and establish strong and sustainable partnerships between States, decision makers, international agencies, donors, and non-governmental organizations, Government, civil society and young people.

- Ensure the involvement of young people in all aspects of programming, policymaking, decision-making and budget planning, at the national, regional and international levels.

- Invest in young people as a priority in population and development strategies, with programming specifically directed at increasing access to information, education, counselling and skills that enable young people to make decisions about their own well-being. Consequently, States should ensure that the different sectors of society are fully informed, sensitized on youth issues and empowered to act in the best interests of young people.

- Develop and enforce non-discriminatory sexual and reproductive health-related laws and policies at local, national, regional and international levels, particularly those concerning young people. This includes eliminating legal and policy barriers, which restrict the access of young people to essential services, such as parental and spousal consent, age of consent and issues of confidentiality, and assessing the credibility of programmes and ensuring transparency and close monitoring that promotes positive progressive results.

- Guarantee universal access to comprehensive sexuality education for all young people and ensure that all existing sexual and reproductive health services are youth-friendly, non-judgemental, recognize and respect diversity and are accessible to all young people, including underserved groups.

We, the participants of the 5th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights Youth Forum:

- Commit our individual capacities towards improving the health and well-being of our societies.
- Commit to sharing accountability towards protecting the health and rights of all individuals.
- Commit to enhance understanding across geographical regions, cultural and religious diversities with a vision to achieving inclusive social development with sustainability.
- Commit to continue promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights as a primary component of equal opportunity and human development.

We would like to emphasize that many of the above-mentioned demands have been made at various instances in the past 15 years. This document has to be seen in continuity with those that have come before.

We Commit. We Recommend. We Deserve.